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AUTHOR Warren, Ida
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ABSTRACT

Although Hispanic-Americans are the fastest growing segment of the population in the United States and have higher participation rates for males in the workforce than Whites or Blacks, there continue to be significant barriers to the employment of Hispanics. The major barriers to job success include lack of English proficiency and early withdrawal from the educational process. For these and other reasons, Hispanics are underrepresented in white-collar jobs, in technical professions, and in the percentage of bachelor's degree recipients in scientific disciplines. A recent study pointed to five major differences between non-minority and Hispanic students in technical programs in community colleges: (1) Hispanics dominated the low-income categories in family income levels; (2) Hispanic students owned fewer sophisticated toys, such as calculators and power tools; (3) fewer Hispanic students held employment prior to college enrollment; (4) fewer Hispanic students' fathers held occupations in technical fields; and (5) fewer Hispanics discussed career choices with guidance counselors in high school. If these differences are not to become the basis for the continued exclusion of Hispanics from important areas of the labor force, an effort must be made to support special programs for Hispanic students in community colleges. (HB)

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BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT OF HISPANICS

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Prepared by Ida Warren, AACJC staff member,
for Hispanic Concerns Roundtable, May 23-
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BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT OF HISPANICS

Hispanic-Americans are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population. The problems Hispanics face in gaining and retaining employment thus must take on greater significance for all Americans if our country is to make productive use of its human resources and maintain a vital economy. Yet the problem of employment barriers is a difficult one to attack, for as the National Commission for Employment Policy notes in its report:¹

The dimensions of their difficulties are often hidden by figures on the position of all Hispanic-Americans, since the type of problem differs among Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban-Americans, and persons from Central and South America. For some, finding work is a severe problem; for others, low pay is the major issue.

Generally, though, there is agreement about the major barriers to job success: lack of English proficiency, early withdrawal from the education process. According to the National Commission for Employment Policy, "Difficulties communicating in English directly reduce their prospects for good jobs, impede their educational attainment and operate as a vehicle for labor market discrimination."²

Certainly Hispanics want to work. One need only to look at the Department of Labor participation rates to find clear evidence. The participation rate is the percentage of the population that is either employed or without employment but actively looking for it. As the National Commission for Employment Policy notes:

1 Hispanics and Jobs: Barriers to Progress, Report No. 14 (September, 1982), p. 9.

2 Ibid.

The labor force participation rate for Hispanic men is higher than that of both white and black men. In 1980 and 1981, about 85 percent of Hispanic men, 20 years or older were in the workforce, compared to 80 percent of white and 75 percent of black, adult men. Hispanic and white women over 20 years old had about the same rate of participation - 50 percent - somewhat below that of black women (56 percent).

Table 1 shows the occupational distribution of Hispanics, and compares these to white and black men.

Table 1

Occupational Distribution, Average Hourly Wage and Median Income
of Hispanic, White, and Black Men

	Total Hispanic	White	Black
<u>Total</u>			
No. Employed, 1979 (Thousands)	2,704	49,893	5,599
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<u>White Collar</u>			
Professional, Technical and Kindred Workers	7.6	15.3	9.8
Managers and Administrators excl. Farm	6.6	14.8	6.5
Sales	3.2	6.3	2.6
Clerical and Kindred Workers	6.2	6.0	7.8
<u>Blue Collar</u>			
Craft and Kindred Workers	20.9	21.7	15.4
Operatives	25.5	17.0	24.6
Laborers, excl. Farm	11.7	7.0	13.6
Farmers and Farm Managers	0.2	4.2	3.9
Farm Laborers and Supervisors	4.7	-	-
Service Workers	13.4	7.8	15.9
Average Hourly Wages, 1975 ^b	\$4.58	\$5.97	\$4.65

a. Men 16 years or older.

b. Men 14 years or older, working for a wage or salary.

Source: National Commission for Employment Policy, Increasing the Earnings of Disadvantaged Women, Report No. 11 (Washington, D.C.: NCEP, January 1981); Massey, "The Demographic and Economic Position;" and Cordelia Reimers, "A Comparative Analysis of the Wages of Hispanic, Black, and White American Men," paper presented at the Hispanic Labor conference, sponsored by the NCEP, Santa Barbara, California, February 4-5, 1982.

Just as Hispanics are underrepresented in white collar jobs, so they are underrepresented in technical professions, such as math, physics, computer science and engineering. Because of the demand for increased technology, the necessity for minority professionals in all technical field is imperative. Yet if we look at bachelor's degrees awarded in the sciences, we find Hispanics have a long way to go before reaching equity.³

Table 2

Bachelor's Degree Awarded in Scientific Disciplines
During 1976-1977
(Figures are in percent)

Field of Study	Blacks	Hispanics	Total Minority
Biological Sciences	4.5	2.9	10.1
Computer Science	5.7	1.8	10.2
Engineering	2.8	2.6	8.1
Health Related	5.4	2.3	9.8
Mathematics	5.0	2.2	9.6
Physical Sciences	3.0	2.0	6.9

A recent study pointed five major differences between non-minority and Hispanic students that seem to influence the success of students in technical programs:

- There were significant differences between family income levels, with Hispanic groups dominating the low-income categories.
- Significant differences existed in the number of sophisticated toys owned by members in each group, such as calculators, power tools, chemistry sets, etc.
- Significantly fewer Hispanic students held employment prior to enrolling.
- Significantly fewer Hispanic students' fathers held occupations in technical fields.

³ Taken from "Data on Earned Degrees Conferred by Institutions of Higher Education by Race, Ethnicity, and Sex, Academic Year 1976-1977." U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office for Civil Rights, August 1979.

- Significantly fewer Hispanic students discussed career choices with guidance counselors in high school.⁴

The disparity in socioeconomic status may account for the differences in the academic performance of the two groups. Clearly, if Hispanics are to achieve parity in the labor market, much must be done to support the work of special programs for Hispanics in community colleges.

The case is clearly documented - Hispanics are not faring well in the labor market. As discussed previously, a lack of English proficiency, low level of education, and the resulting discrimination are the major reasons. Of these three, a lack of English proficiency is the most detrimental.

The National Commission for Employment Policy takes note that investigations into the effects of age, prior work experience, and recentness of immigration on Hispanic job status suggest that these factors are not as crucial as language, education, and discrimination.⁵

It does appear from research that the various Hispanic sub-groups are rewarded differently for education and prior work experience. The National Commission cites two possible reasons for this: (1) state and local areas differ in their industrial and occupational mixes as well as in rate of economic growth, or (2) different groups receive different treatment in the job market."⁶ Because the various sub-groups live in different geographic

⁴ Maureen Burns et. al., "The Current Status of Hispanic Technical Professionals; How Can We Improve Recruitment and Retention," Integrated Education, VOXX, Nos. 1-2 (March 1983), p. 49.

⁵ Hispanics and Jobs: Barriers to Progress, p. 45.

⁶ Ibid.

areas, it is impossible to clarify the exact reason for the differences. What is known is that Cubans have established their own economic communities; Mexican Americans have been assimilated into society more in some states, less in others; and Puerto Ricans continue to face difficulties.

Perhaps one clear place to start to begin to make a difference is in education. If a lack of English language proficiency is the greatest single barrier, perhaps new strategies can be devised for building partnerships between the private and public sector for English language training.

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